

Washington Update – FANR Newsletter

Lewis-Burke Associates LLC – September 30, 2022

As August recess has come and gone, there are several new developments related to agriculture policy of note leading up to the election. The most prominent issues of the last month have been the House Agriculture Committee hearing on the Conservation Title in the Farm Bill and the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Food and Agriculture (USDA) released a solicitation for Regional Food Business Centers and the Biden-Harris Administration announced a partnership with USDA for 70 Climate-Smart commodities and rural projects. More detail on each can be found below:

- ***House Agriculture Committee Holds Farm Bill Hearing Focused on the Conservation Title***
On September 20, 2022 the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry held a [hearing](#) focused on the programs in the Conservation title of the Farm Bill. This is just one in an ongoing series of hearings held by the House Committee reviewing the outcomes of the 2018 Farm Bill in preparation for drafting the 2023 bill. The hearing's witnesses included representatives from non-profit and trade associations. There were no scientists or representation of research universities. Full Committee Ranking Member Glenn "GT" Thompson gave remarks at the opening of the hearing in which he criticized the \$3.5 billion in spending on the Climate Smart Commodities Program as well as other conservation and climate spending passed in the *Inflation Reduction Act*. He did note that producers should be at the center of conservation conversations and that innovative solutions such as precision agriculture can be a solution with bipartisan support. The witnesses and members of the Subcommittee mentioned the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) as one program that does and could continue to make a large impact on reducing the financial burden of implementing conservation practices such as precision agriculture technology, soil health practices, and other measures.
- ***White House Conference on Nutrition***
On September 28, the Biden Administration convened a [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#), the first of its kind in more than 50 years since the 1969 White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health, which led to the development of landmark initiatives including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Ahead of the Conference, the Administration released a National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, which calls for a whole-of-government approach involving more than a dozen federal agencies to address the challenges of widespread malnutrition, diet-related diseases, and access to healthy foods with the twin goals of ending hunger in America by 2030 and reducing the prevalence of chronic disease by increasing healthy eating and physical activity. Some actions mentioned in the strategy are new, while others have already been announced or publicly noticed. Many are likely to be included in the President's budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2024 and beyond.

- ***USDA Regional Food Business Centers***

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has released a solicitation for the new [Regional Food Business Centers](#) program. USDA will fund six Regional Food Business Centers to assist the development of local and regional supply chains with the goal of cultivating resilient and diverse food systems. \$360 million is authorized to fund the centers, with award sizes ranging from \$15 million to \$50 million. The duration of the program is 60 months, with the potential to extend for 12 additional months if activities are not completed. The six centers will be geographically located to serve their respective regions. The Centers will provide three core services to small and mid-sized food and farm businesses: coordination, technical assistance, and capacity building support. The new system will be inclusive of all products produced locally or regionally. The centers aim to grow and strengthen connections between rural and urban areas and allow for economic growth and opportunities across the regions they serve. All application materials are due by **11:59 PM Eastern Time on November 22, 2022**.

- ***Investments in Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities and Rural Projects***

On September 14, USDA announced the recipients of the first pool of the [Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities](#) funding opportunity and made a [list of funded projects](#) available. USDA will invest up to \$2.8 billion in these initial 70 Climate-Smart projects, which included proposals seeking funds ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million. Funded projects focused on a wide range of topics, including greenhouse gasses, agricultural production, and climate-smart production. Announcements of the recipients from the second pool, including proposals seeking \$250,000 to \$5 million, will be announced later this year, with an ultimate investment of more than \$3 billion. USDA received more than 450 applications for this program, which included projects from nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, governmental entities, research universities, farming cooperatives and many other organizations.